

# Yakima County wins program to cut jail costs

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YAKIMA, Wash. — After more than two years of planning, Yakima County is now set to implement a pre-trial program that will allow suspects accused of low-level, non-violent crimes to be released from jail while awaiting trial.

Superior Court officials on Monday announced that the county is among 20 communities nationwide selected this week to implement the pre-release program created by the New York-based Arnold Foundation, which specializes in the development and implementation of programs that give the courts better tools to assess how likely suspects are to stay out of trouble if they are released before trial.

The selection means Yakima County will get about \$100,000 worth of services a year from the foundation.

Work implementing the program begins this week, and it should be up and running by November, said Court Consultant Harold Delia.

A growing local inmate population has stressed the Department of Corrections budget, and recent data has shown that many inmates who would be released anyway remain jailed for upwards of three months, costing the county hundreds of thousands of dollars a year.

Aside from the cost, keeping these suspects behind bars creates more problems for them and increases their likelihood of continuing down a path of crime, he said.

“They lose their jobs, they lose their homes, they lose their families, and they get out and have nothing,” Delia said. “The quicker you can move them out, the better you are.”

Low-level offenses that would be considered for pre-release range from traffic violations — with the exception of drunken driving — to public intoxication and burglary, he said.

Delia cited a recent report from Mecklenburg County, N.C., which has seen a 20 percent reduction in the jail inmate population and an increasing number of suspects returning to court as they are supposed to since implementing the foundation’s program more than a year ago.

“That’s what we’re hoping will happen here,” Delia said.

Under the program, the Arnold Foundation will provide the system software, training and ongoing evaluations to provide statistics about the program’s progress here, he said.

Officials from other communities will visit Yakima County to see how well the program is working, he said.

“So we’ll be seen as a national model for pre-trial when we get this all together,” Delia said. “We’re kind of the pilot.”

Last year the county received a \$150,000 annual grant for three years from the U.S. Department of Justice to develop some aspects of a pre-trial system. That money was used to create new positions for the offices of the prosecutor and public defender to evaluate criminal tendencies within a 24-hour period of a suspect's arrest

That coupled with the Arnold Foundation will see such suspects who meet certain criteria in the program's assessment tool released with 24 hours of being arrested, Delia said.

"It's a huge savings and what research is showing is that people do return to court, they don't lose their jobs, they don't lose their homes and their families," he said.

"Remember, these are people who have not been convicted of any crime, they are just waiting to go to trial."